

Milwaukee County Exec. Abele: Announces free Aira service at public facilities

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County partnership will make facilities more accessible by providing visual description service for people who are blind or low-vision

MILWAUKEE, Thursday, Dec. 20, 2018 – Many Milwaukee County facilities are more accessible starting today, thanks to a first-of-its-kind partnership between the County and Aira. Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele announced on Thursday that [Aira](#), a visual description service for people who are blind or low vision to explore new locations and complete day-to-day tasks, is now available free of charge in select County facilities.

The partnership builds on the recent announcement from Milwaukee County's General Mitchell International Airport (MKE) that Aira would be free to all travelers, giving them open access to Aira's highly trained customer service agents and helping them to move more easily and independently through the airport.

Milwaukee County is building on that partnership by providing free Aira service at several facilities: the Milwaukee County Courthouse, Mitchell Park Domes, Boerner Botanical Gardens, Marcia P. Cogg's Human Services Center, Safety Building, Vel Phillips Youth and Family Justice Center, War Memorial Center, Wehr Nature Center and Milwaukee County Zoo.

In summer 2019, the County plans to expand locations to include several parks

where concerts will be offered, as well as its widely popular permanent and traveling beer gardens..

“At the core of Milwaukee County is a directive to empower the people we serve, and Aira is an incredibly innovative way to achieve that for our residents and visitors who are blind and low-vision,” said Abele. “Most of us don’t realize how heavily we rely on visual cues to navigate and enjoy places we visit every day. Aira helps ensure everyone has access to all the information around us and can leverage it to get the most out of their experiences.”

“We’re proud to be the first county to partner this extensively with Aira and lead the way in promoting accessibility,” he added.

The role of the State in addressing these issues may come in the form of fully funding mandated services, giving local governments a fairer share of the economic benefits from driving development and opening up funding options for local communities to control their own destiny.

Aira is a service that connects people who are blind or low-vision to highly trained, remotely-located agents. Using a smartphone application and phone camera, Aira users can connect with live, sighted agents who provide on-demand visual descriptions and guidance. Agents use real-time video and audio feeds, as well as GPS, maps and other online information, to enhance everyday efficiency, engagement and independence.

In Milwaukee County, blind and low-vision residents and visitors can now use Aira for free while visiting designated locations and seasonal events.

“The ultimate goal of the Milwaukee County Office for Persons with Disabilities is to make Milwaukee County the most accessible county in the country,” said Tim Ochnikowski, Director of the Milwaukee County Office for Persons with Disabilities. “Providing Aira Access, for free to users of the service, is a big step towards this goal, and it goes above and beyond the minimum guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

“We applaud Milwaukee County for welcoming all its citizens to not only its fantastic beer gardens but other county services, parks and events,” said Suman Kanuganti, CEO and Founder of Aira. “Aira Explorers, guests and agents alike love to visit these wonderful facilities, whether in person or through Aira’s virtual presence.”

Aira is available on any iOS or Android phone and can be easily accessed by downloading the [mobile application](#) and completing a brief registration. As soon as a user enters an Aira Access Location, they will receive a notification and will be able to use Aira for free while on the premises.

Aira is also available for free in a number of other locations nationwide, including Walgreens Stores, AT&T retail stores, and more than 20 airports.